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From Civilian Postdoctoral Research Fellow to Navy Lieutenant

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By Doris Ryan, Naval Medical Research Center



It's been almost a year since Chase Watters was wearing a maroon lab coat as a civilian postdoctoral research fellow at the Naval Medical Research Unit – San Antonio (NAMRU-SA), San Antonio, Texas. While there his research focused on using enzymatic debridement agents against multi-drug resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* biofilms.

“I am very thankful I had the opportunity to ‘try before I buy,’ though as my prior commanding officer advised me, there is no way to replicate being in the military other than being in the military,” said Lt. Chase Watters. He added that the commanding officer was right in many ways, as the honor, courage and commitment he witnessed in San Antonio mirrors the environment he is now part of at the Naval Medical Research Center (NMRC).

He pointed out that during his time at NAMRU-SA he met men and women who made their careers in Navy Medicine who were strong charismatic speakers, kind and humorous leaders, and fiercely loyal veterans, and he heard inspirational stories of humanitarian efforts. He had the opportunity to work alongside others from a vast array of scientific disciplines including materials science, electrical engineering, bioengineering, chemical engineering, analytical chemistry, cancer biology, and dentistry.

“As a microbiologist these are a rare assortment of scientific backgrounds to find in one department; a collection of disciplines I would have never come across in the specialized cocoons of academia. I realized that working for the Navy would mean novelty coupled with challenges every day,” said Watters.

Today he is a naval officer and microbiologist in the Medical Service Corps. He is currently serving at NMRC in the Wound Infections Department, which falls under the Infectious Diseases Directorate.

“My role in the department is mainly to research and develop novel therapeutics that can combat multi-drug resistant organisms problematic to the warfighter,” said Watters.

He went on to explain the projects he is now involved in focus on photodynamic therapy, probiotics, bacteriophage, and the development of an acute care covering for severely injured limbs.

Since joining the department he has collaborated and assisted in the submission of three research grant proposals working with groups from the Naval Research Laboratory, and possible collaborators in the Netherlands and at the University of Cincinnati.

“I’ve also submitted an Office of Naval Research In-House Laboratory Independent Research proposal and obtained funding to study the complementation of photodynamic therapy with bacteriotherapy to enhance the resolution of wound infections,” he said.

He was also excited to add that his research team found a bacterial probiotic strain that almost completely inhibited all five of the ESKAPE (*Enterococcus faecalis*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, *Acinetobacter baumannii*, and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*) pathogens tested.

“My favorite component about being a naval officer is that the Navy stretches you to meet the mission. You wear whatever hat the Navy needs, and this has you always changing, morphing, and evolving into a new and improved creature,” Watters said. “In addition to conducting relevant research, I’ve inspected drug lockers, helped host chili cook-offs, coordinate command urinalyses, and mentored midshipmen with chess at the U.S. Naval Academy. Anytime, and anywhere the Navy takes me next, I stand ready.”

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